

Mayor's Column for the February 9, 2011 Review

Last week Evansville City Administrator Dan Wietecha wrote a thorough article in the Review about local government budgeting. Dan and I will be spending much time and effort on 2010, 2011, and 2012 city budgets in the coming months, including keeping citizens informed of current details. We will be working alongside the Finance Director, Finance Committee, Common Council, and Department Heads and City Staff. We all work for you and recognize the importance of providing the best possible municipal services while stretching scarce tax dollars.

At our monthly Department Head meeting held on Monday of this week, I discussed a page 2 article from the February 5-6, 2011, *Wall Street Journal* entitled "Local Government Jobs More at Risk." Author Mark Whitehouse begins: "The economic slump may be just beginning for thousands of teachers, police, office clerks and other local-government workers still on the job." Whitehouse points out that many states are closing budget gaps by pushing problems down to the local level, reducing local aid and, in many circumstances, shifting government responsibilities downward. Since labor costs are a significant portion of local municipal budgets, revenue reductions will likely have negative impacts on municipal employees. He states that another prevalent budget issue is the prolonged housing slump, which has put pressure on property tax revenues. Ethan Harris, chief North America economist at Bank of America Merrill Lynch of New York is quoted regarding the difficulty in forecasting the results of local government cuts on the fledging economic recovery, stating "we don't really have any empirical results to compare this to. This is clearly worse than any previous state and local crisis." Whitehouse concludes that a strong economic recovery could take years.

Earlier last week, I was sobered when New York Governor Cuomo announced his proposed state budget, which included a 13% plus reduction in spending on public schools. A similar cut in Wisconsin would be a severe blow to local school districts across our state.

Governor Walker, in his State of the State address last week, spoke of a re-structuring in the relationship between state and local governments. It is a shot across the bow in terms of local budget expectations. His budget proposals will be forthcoming in the next two weeks. I have been told that a current budget repair bill is ready for introduction this week. The proposed 2011-2013 budget will be presented on February 22. Once Governor Walker has indicated local aid parameters in his budget proposals, we can begin to address impacts on our city.

An example of an increase in local responsibilities likely in Wisconsin is the proposed Voter ID legislation. Independent of the political views associated with this bill, there will be increased local costs. Additional training of poll workers and increased handling of absentee and provisional ballots will result in higher elections expenses in local municipal budgets.

The Finance Committee, City Alders, and City Staff will get a first look at 2010 year-end budget results this week. City auditors will commence the 2010 audit in mid-March.

After the April election, we will schedule a Common Council Committee of the Whole meeting to touch on some strategic issues and begin serious discussion on budget realities. We may need to take mid-year corrective actions to align expenses with immediate cuts in shared revenue, should they occur.

Some preliminary thoughts:

- Continue implementing energy efficiency measures with dedicated funds currently available to capture additional long-term reductions in municipal energy costs.
- Review user fees to confirm all related costs are covered (not popular, but fair).
- Look for opportunities for collaboration with others. Joint purchasing opportunities should be investigated. One area already being discussed is county-wide purchasing of emergency equipment to take advantage of bulk pricing. Other areas that could be explored are purchasing efficiencies within the Arrowhead Library System (Eager Free Public Library is a member) and possible coordination of purchases and services between the city and school district.
- While labor costs exceed 60% of our budget, I am dedicated to making all possible efforts to preserve needed jobs. Ideas worth exploring are looking for job efficiencies and tweaking of service hours. The Library has already changed its closing time as a cost-saving measure. In the past we have discussed, but have not had to institute furloughs.
- Solicit and explore citizen suggestions for cost savings.

Expect several future mayor's columns to be dedicated to City finances. As always, I can be reached at sandy.decker@ci.evansville.wi.gov or by phone at 882-2266.

Energy Saving Tip

Evansville Water & Light customers recently received eco@home, which suggested many energy-saving ideas. One focus was on windows—up to 25% of your heating bill can be from heat loss through and around windows. Apply weather stripping to seal gaps around windows and window frames. Closing blinds and drapes at night can slow heat loss; opening them during the day allows the warmth of the sun into your home. Invest in storm windows to add an extra layer of insulation; it is less expensive than installing new windows.

Community Announcements

The Friends of the Eager Free Public Library will hold their Annual Winter Gently Used Book Sale on Saturday, February 12, from 9:30 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Abe Lincoln's Birthday Party Family Event, with Civil-War era music and games, "living" history, and, of course, birthday cake, will be held on Saturday, February 12, at 5:00 to 7:00 p.m. The event is free.

The Evansville Fund Chocolate Extravaganza will be held this Saturday, February 12, from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. at the Eager Economy Building, 7 East Main Street.

The Evansville Jays Home Talent Baseball Team "Strike Out for Baseball" 9-Pin Tap Bowling Tournament will be held at the Evansville Bowl on Saturday, February 12, at 5:00 p.m. and 8:00 p.m.

The spring primary election will be held on Tuesday, February 15, from 7:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m. at Creekside Place (Senior Center room), 320 Fair Street.

There is a limited supply of Discover Wisconsin-Evansville DVDS available for purchase at City Hall. The cost for a DVD is \$10, which includes sales tax. The second television airing of the Evansville episode will occur on Saturday, August 27, 2011.

Snow removal has been a large job for everyone recently. A reminder to residents: Wisconsin law prohibits snow from being shoveled/blown/pushed into streets and roads.

Community Congratulations/Thanks

The Packer Nation has been satisfied. What a great and exciting game! Evansville congratulates the Green Bay Packers.

Our community thanks Pat Reese, Chris Jones, Matthew Nankee, Jeremy Jobs, and Jill Puckett of the Evansville Police Department for supporting the Special Olympics by participating as the Law Dogs in the upcoming Special Olympics Polar Plunge. It will be held on February 19 at Olin Turville Park in Madison from 10:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m.